

THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

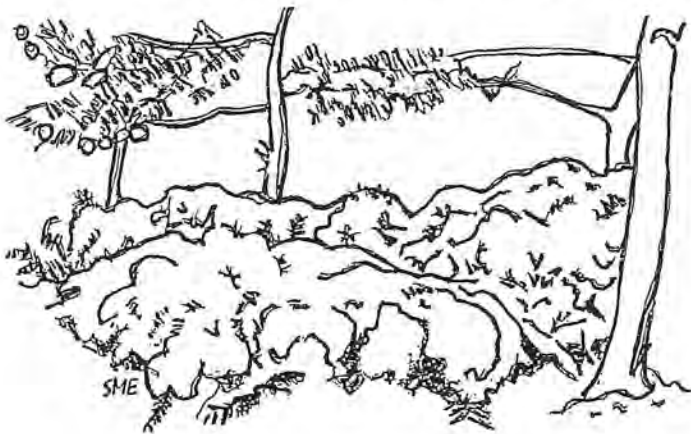
Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol.8 No. 1

January~ February 2002

Brief Magic

Late at night the snow came flying, sliding through air in white sheets. All night it fell, silently, steadily, covering cool rooftops, warm dirty streets and muffling traffic. Bare trees and dull parkland were frosted with a 3-inch layer by morning-- a Sunday treat. Out came troops to scrape the streets and walks. Explorers made new paths through hidden landscape. Children of all ages emerged with skates and sleds to fashion the snow to their pleasure.



Having kept vigil in the night, I slept late and was slow to leave my apartment. I took a sketch pad with me, hoping that snow still etched white patterns on some of the trees.



Stepping off the bus I entered the park at 59th St. and I found a tree with dark, curving limbs still lined with snow. I stood and sketched as nearby carriages passed me to enter the park. Even the blinkered horses looked cheerful.

Walking toward Hallett Sanctuary, I came to its western fence. Across the walk thin pine trees and deep shadow preserved a thick, fluffy cover on the evergreen bushes. They looked like snow-clad sheep. As I sketched, white-throats, chickadees and a titmouse landed on small trees and eyed me expectantly. When I produced no feed, they dropped to the ground and scratched through snow and leaves for the seed scattered there. I was glad of their company and they didn't fear mine. The air was still and fresh but the sun was sinking. Time to go, decreed my chilly toes.

Waterfowl in Winter

Usually, doing the waterfowl count is fun. Sometime the weather is bitter cold, or it's raining, but sometimes, like this year, the day is sunny, fairly mild and winds are calm. I did the count for a second time with Rick Friesen, a former park birder who was in town for a visit from California. Rick is competent and cheerful so it was a pleasure to do the count with him. He said his feet are bad and wasn't sure how long he could count. I met him at the Reservoir and we circled it slowly, dismayed by great rafts of ruddy duck, delighted by a cluster of canvasback and baffled by bufflehead. The bufflehead stayed in pairs but dove separately. Waiting for resurfacing mates made pair counting slow work.

At the north end of the Reservoir we were joined by Tom Fiore on his way to the dentist. I was not sure I would make it to the 59th St. Pond before sundown and Tom said he would look over that fenced-in area if the dentist didn't keep him late. Before he left Tom told us about his gift bird. On Christmas Day he was in the park with his parents, Mary and Joe, Pat Pollack and Chris Vogel. It was 2:15 PM when they reached Willow Rock. Tom looked down expecting to see sparrows and was amazed to see a rufous hummingbird catching small flying insects. Later Tom called Tom Burke at Rare Bird Alert. He wondered if this young, male, Western hummingbird had come south

from Yonkers. No, said Tom Burke. At 2:15 he was watching the Yonkers celebrity while another rufous hummingbird was being seen in the park.

Rick and I went to the Meer and mounted the rocks for an overview of mallard, Canada goose and shoveler. We hiked past a fenced-in and empty 100 St. Pool to Turtle Pond. It was easy to count mallard from the platform because they all came to us for a handout. In open water on the west side of the Lake we saw 2 pair of wood duck. Nearby a large party of shoveler were moving in a tight circle to twirl up food. Watching them was like trying to census a merry-go-round. Ice covered most of the Lake, edged by a melted margin along the shore. Mallard filled the margin and circled the Lake like a giant's necklace—something I've never seen before. We slowly counted our way past all 5 swan at Bow Bridge with black and hybrid duck nearby. We circled past Bethesda Fountain and said good-bye at the Boat House. Rick said his feet were fine and I told him how grateful I was for his help. At Conservatory Waters I found 2 dozen mallard in the fading light.

When I reached home there were phone messages from 2 birders I had hoped would join me. Both had problems with health and schedules. Tom Fiore called to say the dentist got rid of him quickly. He gave me total numbers not only for 59th St. Pool but Conservatory Water, Rowboat Lake, and the Reservoir. He met Pat Pollock and compared sightings with her. I was grateful for his numbers, which mostly matched with ours. Jeff Nulle, who has been part of this count for 4 years, said backache would keep him from it this year. But good weather lured him out. He called with a partial list recited at top speed. Luckily, he saw a rare pintail near the Indian Cave, which all the rest of us missed.

I couldn't remember how I started doing this count. But in the file, I found a 1987 letter from Peter Tozzi, who was a marvelous birder. My name had been approved to count in Central Park. I was to list the birds, list the names of counters, total the hours of counting and describe the weather. I have been doing it ever since—surprisingly, for 15 years. That's the same time period Will Shortz has been Puzzle Master on National Public Radio. He said 15 years showed "sticktoitiveness," a word he clearly chose with pleasure. Annual winter bird counts are nothing compared to producing weekly puzzles, but in my case the time has come to pass the honor on to someone else.

Here are 9 of the last 15 years of counts. For most of the 1980's we saw gigantic populations of lesser scaup and canvasback. They covered the Reservoir, often with 1 or 2 rare, European tufted duck as well. In 1987, that all changed. There were no tufted duck, less than 200 canvasback or lesser scaup. In 1990, 1 canvasback was counted. A tufted duck and 25 lesser scaup were seen but are starred because they appeared the day after the count. Black duck and mallard appear regularly. The small population of black duck is dwindling, the large mallard population is growing. Ruddy duck more than doubled their number in '98, more than tripled that number in '99. In 2001 there were none because ice covered the water.

Federation of New York State Bird Clubs ~ Jan. Waterfowl Counts

	1987	1990	1993	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Pied-billed Grebe					1	2	4		1
D-crest.Cormorant			1			4	2		3
Canada Goose	1				31	221	20	29	132
Mute Swan				5	2		4		5
Wood Duck			1			3		4	5
Gadwall						3		4	
Am. Black Duck	29	59	34	11	18	29	11	11	12
Mallard	323	429	371	223	659	830	387	629	494
Mallard X Black	3		2	1	17	9	2	3	2
Northern Shoveler	4		4	19	6	12	75	14	96
Northern Pintail			2						1
Green-winged Teal								2	
Canvasback	181	1		1		2	1	1	9
Redhead				3					
Ring-necked Duck	1			4	1	6	1	1	1
Tufted Duck		*1							
Greater Scaup	6								
Lesser Scaup	162	*25							
Bufflehead		2	4		10	1	6	1	8
Common Goldeneye			1						
Hooded Merganser							1	5	5
Ruddy Duck	247	3	42	81	557	1780	328		1042
American Coot		1		13	17	33	20	1	1

During the second half of the '90's mute swan and Canada goose came to our park and stayed. The swan nest here and Canada are seen year round in growing numbers. Recently, we have regularly seen pied-billed grebe, wood duck, ring-necked, bufflehead, hooded merganser and coot. Shoveler numbers are growing rapidly. But pintail, green-winged teal, redhead and goldeneye are very rare, reported only once or twice. In 1999, Tom Fiore reported seeing a common goldeneye from Feb. 22 to March 13. What a pity it wasn't here in January for our count!

This winter an American widgeon arrived in the park and on Feb. 9, I went to see it at the Lower Lobe, with a few other birders. Because this male widgeon was near us, we produced this group description: The bird wears a head stripe, yellow above the bill turning white at the crown. The head and nape are black, the eyes are covered with green teardrops that don't meet at the back of the head. The cheeks and neck are gray stippled with black. The bill is blue-gray with black edging along the sides and a black tip. The flanks are pink, the tail is black. The wings are buff-pink with black tips outlined in white. When the bird lifted from the water we could see that the belly, under tail coverts and wing pits are white. The legs and feet are gray. See if you can make a sketch of this widgeon from our words.

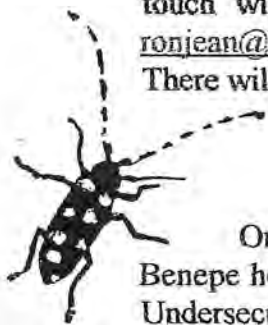
As we watched the widgeon I realized I've seen it elsewhere but never in Central Park. Neither has Bob DeCandido, I was told. Old records show the birds were seen fairly regularly in the 1950's. Peter Post reported seeing 152 of them on November 20, 1956. Then they disappeared to be seen in other parks but not ours. Now they have reappeared. Nick Wagerik saw one October 3, 1999 at Turtle Pond, but that record was not put in the Bird Book. Tom Fiore reported seeing at least 5 American widgeon on September 19, 2000 at the Reservoir. In the book he wrote that 3 were males in non-breeding plumage and 2 possibly young females. Phil Sussman was one of the group who helped describe this year's February male. He went home to check his records. Sure enough, he saw a widgeon October 27, '01, but didn't realize it was unusual. That makes 8 widgeon in 4 years. This year's visitor was here the longest, but not in time for the waterfowl count, alas.

In a recent card from Ron and Jean Bourque, I learn that the troops in Region 10 counted 138,767 birds this January. Besides Central Park, region 10 includes everything from Montauk and Orient point to Staten Island. Obviously they need more counters to cover the area. Waterfowl move about so they want people to count on the same day, usually a Sunday. If you wish to participate in the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs Waterfowl Count next January, you should get in touch with Ron and Jean Bourque at 2250 Brigham St., Brooklyn, NY 11229, E-mail ronjean@banet.net or phone (718) 648-1684. Do it now while you have the numbers in front of you. There will be a report of this count in The Kingbird next fall.

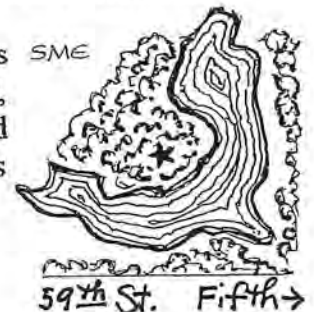
The Year of the Beetle

On Saturday afternoon, Feb. 9, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe held a news conference at the East Meadow near Fifth Ave. They were joined by USDA Undersecretary of Agriculture Bill Hanks. These men discussed the discovery of 2 trees, a Norway maple and a sugar maple, that were infected by Asian longhorn beetle. The beetle is about an inch long, shiny, black with white spots. Some have antenna double the length of their bodies. Asian longhorn beetles are a new threat to American trees.

They have no natural enemies and attack many kinds of hardwood trees including maple, birch, elm, willow, horsechestnut, poplar and ash. Since 1996, the city and state have removed 3,545 infested trees in Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan. The maples are news because they are the first infested trees discovered in Central Park.



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59th St. Fifth →

Our park is home to some 26,000 trees. Nearly half of them are hardwoods and potential hosts to the beetle. Crews of specialists have been inspecting the upper branches of our trees from 110th St. down to 59th St. Just when they thought the park was clean, these 2 maples were found in Hallett Sanctuary, overlooking the newly restored and redesigned 59th St. Pool. Maple branches were riddled with enough holes to show beetle larvae have been boring away for 2 years.

When a female Asian longhorn beetle lands in the branches of a hardwood tree, she deposits as many as 50 eggs that grow into larvae. The larvae chew, tunnel, reproduce and spread. They cannot be killed or contained by current pesticides. Luckily, these beetles are poor flyers, but they can move to nearby trees. The host tree must be destroyed to keep the plague from spreading. Trees surrounding the infected maples were thoroughly inspected. The ground was searched for frass, small piles of wood shavings mixed with beetle waste which the larvae push out as they tunnel through the tree. After inspection of the area the maples were cut down, chopped up, hauled out, chipped to small pieces and burned.

Officials plan to inspect 13,000 trees in the park that are vulnerable to attack. Doug Blonsky, Chief Operating Officer of the Central Park Conservancy, said that inspectors had already examined about 3,000 trees in detail, which is how they discovered the maples. This year, tree climbers will be hired and inspectors will move about in bucket trucks to search the upper reaches of the trees. Right now, the beetles are supposed to be dormant. But in July female beetles will start laying eggs. The USDA plans to be ready. The base of trees 1/8 mile or more from the dead maple area will be injected with the insecticide *Imidacloprid*, or *Imicide*. The poison moves through the tree's circulatory system: up the trunk, out the branches and even into the twigs and leaves. This poison is meant to kill adult beetles before they can lay eggs.

Let's hope it does. The process is very costly. It may curb this problem but cause many others. I suspect *Imicide* will kill more than one kind of beetle. What will it do to aphids and moth larvae that winter on the trees and in spring provide fast food for millions of migrating birds? If insects are wiped out, what will adult birds eat or feed their young? How will *Imicide* affect spiders, butterflies, dragonflies, fireflies and bees? The pesticide is long lasting and could affect tree life in all seasons.

What will it do to birds? Some birds such as nuthatches and brown creepers glean bugs from tree bark all year long. Sapsuckers, as their name suggests, drill for tree sap and sip. They return to each hole for a meal of insects stuck to the sap. Hummingbirds follow them around for tasty leftovers. If their diet is spiced with *Imicide*, what will happen to them? What will happen to woodpeckers who drill tree holes for nests in spring, roosts in winter? How will *Imicide* affect young birds, squirrels and raccoons who begin their lives deep in tree holes? As yet, we don't know the answers to these questions.

At the news conference, I copied a map with a star for the beetle attack area, and these samples of baked maple branch. The holes in the branches looked formidable and make clear that we must rescue our trees from this destruction. But not at the risk of all kinds of life. World travel and trade bring us more and more insects and viruses that pose new threats. Our weapons of defense must be varied and species-specific, not broad-scale chemical warfare. We need international groups of doctors and scientists working to find benign ways to save our trees, our wildlife and us.



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→ People have been calling about SPRING BIRD CLASSES. They begin Sunday, April 14, 9AM at ← Loeb Boathouse or Wednesday, April 17, 9AM at 76St. & Fifth Ave. You get five classes for \$35, or \$10 for one. Send \$35 check by April 1 to address below.

THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol.8 No. 2

March~ April 2002

Flower Power

Last fall 40,000 daffodil bulbs were planted in Central Park in memory of the people who lost their lives at the World Trade Center. The bulbs were part of a gift from people in the Netherlands to the people of New York.

They were planted over the park by staff and volunteers. Members of the public were invited to help plant bulbs in (1) a teardrop shaped garden just north of the Dairy, and (2) near the Dana Center in the northeast corner of the park. This spring our park has been awash with yellow daffodils. And so has our city.

More than one and a half million bulbs were donated to mostly unknowing New Yorkers. The gift included 500 thousand from B & K Bulbs in the Netherlands and 500 thousand from the city and Port Authority of Rotterdam. If this gift seems awesome, so does the effort it took to plant the bulbs. The Central Park Conservancy, Parks Council, Coalition for New York City Parks, and City of New York/Parks & Recreation all joined forces. Called the Daffodil Project, it was the largest citizen-driven effort in New York City's history. And it all began when the president of B & K Bulbs called his good customer Linden Miller, who orders plants for many city gardens. What could he do to help? Send bulbs, she replied. And just look what happened.

This spring, as I bus around the city, I point out the flowers to New Yorkers. Most of them haven't noticed the beauty and had no idea of the gift! The media believe that bad news sells. So they ignore news stories such as the Daffodil Project, the sort of news we need to sustain us.

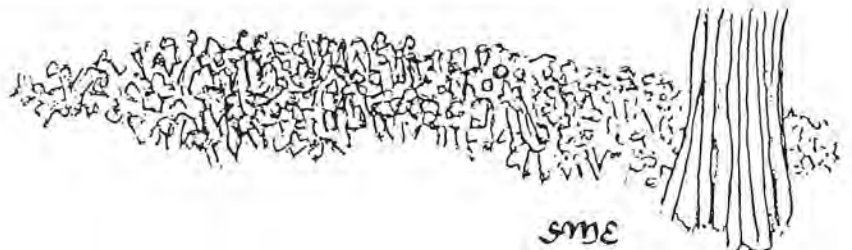
Well, the weather didn't help either. The day I made these sketches behind the Dairy, it was almost 80 in the shade. The 90 degree heat wave that followed brought out and wilted flowers. But there are still daffodils and tulips to see around town. Europeans used to remark on the lack of flowers in our city parks. No one can say that now.



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Scots wha hae

On April 6, we had another newsworthy event that was mostly shunned by the media. It was the first Tartan Day parade ever held in North America and, they hoped, the biggest bagpipe parade in the world. Tartan Day celebrates the 1320 signing of the declaration of Scottish independence. Squads of bagpipers and drummers assembled by clan and marched in well-organized units up Sixth Ave. from Midtown to the Tavern on the Green. They entered the park and continued piping, drumming and marching up the West Drive to the 72nd St. Transverse, where they disbanded. Many women of a certain age said they came to see dishy Sean Connery, who led the parade in his kilt with his granddaughter.



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I have never seen so many different tartans (wool plaids, each woven in several colors) or kilts (knee-length, pleated skirts) in my life. When I arrived, I was told more than 75 squads had marched already. Most of the marchers were men. Some were women, whose numbers have increased in the last half century. In each section I saw children as well. People came from Central and Western Canada. I talked to a family from Ohio who said the organizers were trying to beat the record number of marchers last year in Scotland. When I admired a man's kilt I was told he and it belonged to the clan of Macbeth. Each clan has 3 different tartans: one old, one work-a-day, and one for dress. Some marching units displayed all three. Alan Feuer wrote in The New York Times that pipers played "The Battle of the Creeks" and "The Barren Rocks of Aden." I was told that as they marched, every third selection was the Scottish anthem. Several times I heard a grand tune about a something boy to the wars has gone. Jeff Nulle tells me it's "The Minstrel Boy" which begins "The Minstrel Boy to the war is gone, In the ranks of death you'll find him; His father's sword he has girded on, And his wild harp slung behind him." Jeff said the author, Thomas Moore (1779-1852), is Irish! The Scottish anthem is "Scotland the Brave." It could be they share the melody with different lyrics. Good tunes travel.

This is the first time I have seen marching bands *inside* Central Park. It was grand to hear the skirl of pipes and rattattoo of drums float out on the cool spring air. The watching crowd seemed somewhat mystified and uncertain how to react to the pipers. So they applauded -- a genteel reception for the "Ladies from Hell."

Nests and Young

That day, thanks to a call from Karen Asakawa, I went to the park to see some exciting new arrivals. They are a pair of young screech owls, decked out in fluffy pin feathers. They were said to be about 30 days old and were sitting in an elm tree at the West Drive and the 77 St. exit. Under them was a cluster of excited bird watchers with binoculars and telescopes. Deborah Allen arrived and took pictures, one of which appeared in The New York Times. The young and their mother moved into the willow tree at the top of the Upper Lobe. They are very hard to see from the walk so birders scramble down the bank and search out the birds from the base of the willow.

We were gazing up at the young owls on May 5, when Irv Canter came along whistling the gurgling call of the screech owl. He said he found a nest of screech owls in the North end of the park the year he began bird watching--1932. He said he had a very hard time convincing Jeff Carleton and others that the screech owl nest was authentic. Verification of his sighting seems to have been grudging but he saw screech owl nests for several years thereafter. Then the owl's territory was disturbed by economics.

It was the Great Depression and most Americans were out of work. Thousands of young men were hired by the federal government in work programs of the WPA and CCC to write state histories, build roads and post offices, drain land and plant trees. In Central Park Siberian crabapples were planted in Conservatory Garden and still shade the walks there. The pin oaks that line the Lake northeast of Bow Bridge stand, like soldiers, at a uniform distance apart. Irv says that people covered the park to smooth and clip every blade of grass and shape every shrub. All this work was good for humans but bad for owls. When their territory was disturbed, they left the park. I don't remember hearing about any screech owl nests since 1960, so these new-born owls are here after a long hiatus.

Green herons built a nest on the west shore of the Upper Lobe. We watched one stand to tuck and arrange bits of vegetation around it. She dropped to the water, caught and ate a sunfish. Then

she went right back to sit on her eggs. Covering is necessary because, despite an active mate to guard her, 2 black-crowned night-herons are in constant attendance.

The most unusual nest this spring was built in a yellow piece of equipment at the Maintenance Meadow parking lot. It had wheels and a flat plate on the ground. There is dark screening at the back end and in the upper left corner Carolina wrens were building a nest of twigs. I watched both wrens work on the nest, made a sketch of the back of the yellow structure, and went around to discover it was a cement mixer. The wrens were smart enough to abandon their nest. We saw them investigating property near the Point.



The male's call rang through the woods. When Bob DeCandido "pished" for birds at the top of the rise above the Boat House, the female Carolina wren looked out of her nest hole. The hole and tree are near a lamppost, and the place would be easy to tell other birders about. That night there was a heavy rainstorm. Next day, all was silent and a large stain of water flowed down the tree from the hole. But it's an ill storm that rains no good. I saw a red-bellied woodpecker put his head into a tree hole in the Locust Grove. Then he pulled it out pointing bill skyward. When he did this several times I realized he was knocking back drinks of water from the hole.

The red-tails at their Fifth Ave. nest have 2 young this year. Some days we see fuzzy white heads stretch up for food. Their mother, Pale Male's new mate, has been named Lolita because she is young. Hawks mate for life or the life of the mate and this is Pale Male's 4th partner. Her color is light and some birders think that she's his daughter.

For me, the thrill of the nesting season is about to begin. The Baltimore orioles are back. On Tuesday afternoon, May 7, I was with James McCollough and his class of delightful five-year-old children, when I saw Robin Villa. I waved to her and she came over to tell me an oriole was right near us in the sycamore tree. Most of the class got to see and hear the bird. James looked dazed with delight and told me he had never seen this bird before. Next day, my Wednesday class heard many orioles in trees across the park. In Strawberry Fields, we saw a brilliant male feeding on a bush. The bird was a foot off the ground and stayed long enough for James to get a good look through his binoculars. That same day we saw a scarlet tanager swoop about in trees over the Gill. All the class oohed and aahed for the beauty of it, but those birds don't stay in our park to nest.

Elusive Evodia

Last fall we visited the evodia tree in Evodia Field and admired the seed clusters that attract more than a dozen species of migrating birds. Capsules and seeds fell to the ground and we gathered them up in hopes of raising evodia treelets for the park. Anne McCollough did not separate the seeds from the capsules. She wrapped everything she collected in a damp paper towel and stored it in her freezer for half a year. This spring when she removed the bundle there she found a growing plant. She put it in a pot with soil and it did well. But then we had a heat wave with 90 degree weather. The plant fell over on its side. Anne propped it up and it lingered for a while, but never recovered. Next fall, more of us will try putting evodia seeds with their capsules into our freezers. My sketches are of an evodia branch on the tree, a cluster of evodia seeds and Anne's plant propped up in a pot. I am grateful she took a photo of the plant from which I made the sketch.



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Mapping Eden

In April, I despaired of ever finishing both this newsletter and a bird watchers map of the Ramble and Environs. But better late than never and here are the maps before the spring migration is over. I put these maps on legal size paper which folds to fit into a business size envelope with your newsletter. I am mailing them together to save \$60 worth of postage.

If you make a list of park locations and number them, you are sure to find you have left something out. Usually, the omission comes at the top of the list. When the name is inserted, everything must be renumbered. The real task is to unstick numbers on the map and put on new ones that match the revised list. I did this several times and can only hope what you have here is correct. But only Allah is perfect.

I have been asked the origin of some Ramble place names and here is a little of their history. **12. Maintenance Meadow** was named by Berry Baker because this flat grassy area lies just south of the Maintenance Building. **13.,14. Tupelo Meadow and Sour Gum Tree.** The flat meadow south of the castle dominated by a glorious tree. Tupelo is an American Indian name which refers to one of three trees, including this black tupelo. Sour Gum is the name early colonists gave this specific tree, which turns brilliant red in fall. The **15. Humming Tombstone** is really an electrical power converter, I think. I don't understand its mechanism but named it for the boxy shape, like a mausoleum, and because it vibrates as it converts one number of volts to another. My name for the area was known to few until one spring when a cerulean warbler was found in a tree just behind it. A hundred birders learned the name that day. **24. Mugger's Woods** was named by Lambert Pohner for his experience there. Lambert, who spent weekdays in the park, had several run-ins with would-be attackers. Using the skills he learned and used as an army MP (Military Police) in World War II, he disarmed or scared off all assailants. **27. Evodia Field** I named for the 2 evodia trees that graced it. In the 1970's, one evodia was rammed by a park grass mower hard enough to seriously gouge the tree trunk. Rot set in and the tree died. I asked a parks person to cut back a tree that was crowding the remaining evodia. He used chemicals instead. It not only discouraged the tree but seems to have spread to the evodia. Branches on the south side of the tree are dead and need to be pruned. We hope this evodia can be saved and another evodia added, especially now that the Evodia Field has become the location of the winter bird feeders. **30. Swampy Pin Oak** is a triangle of land east of the Summer House that contains 2 large pin oaks. I named this area for them and because in spring the ground became quite watery due to bad plumbing. M.M. Graff sneered. There is no such tree as a swampy pin oak, she said. **32. Willow Rock** was named, I think by me, for the flat ledge of stone flanked by willow trees. The trees still live but some of them have fallen over. **33. The Oven** was named by John Farrand Jr. when he was President of the Linnaean Society. It refers to the low land between Willow Rock and the top of the Point. In winter when the trees are bare, the sun's rays warm the area enough to hatch insects and attract birds. **35. Hackberry Hill** is a circle of cement surrounded by benches and hackberry trees. I named this area last year after we all crowded there and looked west into a tall tulip tree full of warblers, orioles and indigo buntings. **16. Upper Lobe** and **43. Lower Lobe** were named by Bert Hale for the north and south fingers of water that enter from the Lake. A cryptographer during the Korean War, Bert had wit, charm, and erudition. He improved my birding skills and said he always saw a good bird for his birthday on May 10, which is today. I keep and map some of these park place names for continuity and some to honor the dead. A few locations, named long ago when the park was new, are still used today, which is gratifying.

THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol. 8 No. 3

May~June 2002

Gentle Rain from Heaven

This millennium has become known for lack of rain, among other things. Our most recent drought in New York, said Regina Alvarez, Woodland Manager for Central Park Conservancy, began at the end of summer in 2001. That year we had a dry fall and a bone-dry winter, only relieved by April rains. But April couldn't redress 3 or 4 dry summers.

Of all the plants in our park the trees are most at risk from drought because they require the most water and they have been the worst hit. In the last 2 years we have lost many large ash trees and sycamore maples, especially in the North Woods and on the Great Hill. Tree loss is more scattered throughout the rest of the park. This spring work crews have been scrambling to keep up with pruning dead branches from living trees and cleaning up after dead trees.

Even if they remain upright, the lack of water means trees grow smaller leaves. So there is less leaf surface for photosynthesis to take place and the tree will make less food. Less food means more stress before fall. Will heavy rains solve the problem? No, rainstorms could make it worse. Large trees have LOTS of leaves to catch the rain. Heavy rains add enormous weight to the crown of the tree. Under that burden, stressed branches and tree trunks crack and fall.

Weather conditions affect trees in other ways as well. Rain and chilly weather in April encouraged fungal growth on London plane trees. The trees lost their leaves and only now are beginning to make new ones. Combating fungus and replacing leaves increases their stress. Horse chestnuts have a different problem every year. In July and August the sun beats down on them. Their leaves turn brown, not from disease but sunburn!

Lawns are not at risk from the drought. They may turn dry and brown but will come back with rain. Because they are easy to revive, there are no plans for fencing more lawns. Lawns are at risk of damage when the grass is wet, not dry. In a drought, bushes on rock outcrops are at risk where there is only a thin layer of soil. Bushes in deeper soil or in shade under trees will do better. Flowers and ferns will be OK in shade but bake in the sun.

Because of the fear of drought, orders for plants were greatly reduced this spring. Regina said about 3/4 of the park planting list was canceled. Almost no woody plants were purchased because they require the most water to put out roots. Once they are established they can make do with less water. Central Park is on water restrictions mandated by the city. The Great Lawn and Sheep Meadow will get watered but many other lawns will not. Flower beds will be watered by hand, only as needed. The process is labor intensive and takes a long time.

We need, steady gentle rain, not a downpour. Heavy rains not only weigh down trees, they run off the landscape. To collect and hold more water, park staff have been putting down wood chips and semi-composted leaves. These layers help rainwater penetrate the soil and they reduce evaporation. Regina urges you to help park plants during the drought. Stay on the pathways and respect the fences. Worn pathways expose tree roots and they are under enough pressure already. To which I add, if you buy bottled water in the park and don't finish it, give what's left to the plants, especially tree roots.

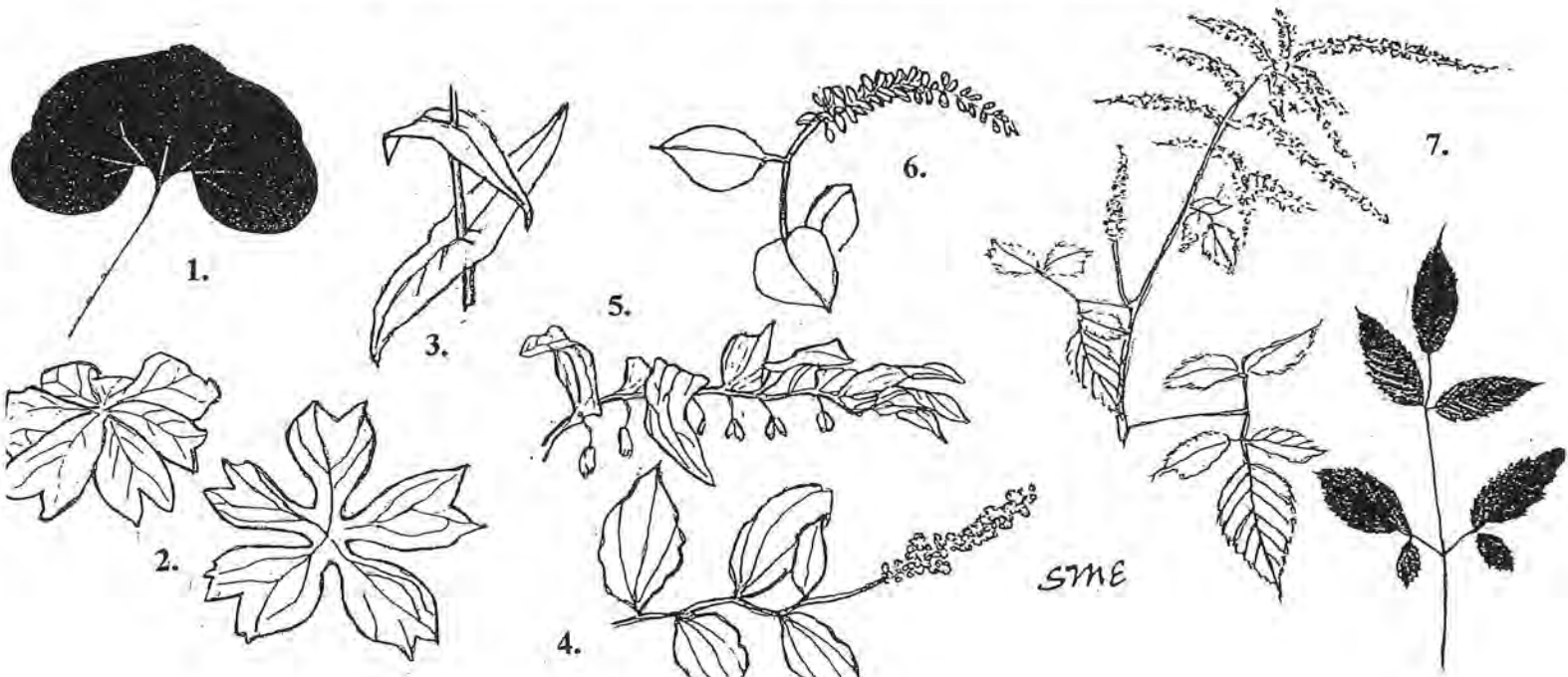
Touring Tanner Spring

In her interesting and valuable book, "Tree Trails of Central Park," Mrs. M. M. Graff described Tanner's Spring as a "tiny spring and a thread-sized brook," named for Dr. Henry S. Tanner. In 1880, Dr. Tanner determined to fast 40 days and nights. He planned to avoid both food and drink, but found he needed water. He was unable to drink Croton, bottled or mineral water, but was sustained by the pure water from this Central Park spring. The doctor completed his fast and the place was named for him. The water was considered pure, but in time became less so. In the late 1960's, Mrs. Graff wrote that it flowed through an open box frequented by pigeons.

Summit Rock, the highest spot in Central Park, towers over Tanner Spring. In 1996 the Summit Rock area was renovated and dedicated to Betsy Barlow Rogers. Tanner Spring was part of that restoration project and was designed to attract birds. Gradually bird watchers found the place and came to watch the many birds that drink and bathe there during the spring and fall migration.

On June 4, Regina Alvarez kindly gave me a tour of the flowers, shrubs and trees that enclose the rocks and water of Tanner Spring. Inner and outer fencing protects this circle of green, making some of the plants hard to see but ensuring that they won't be trampled to death.

We began at the southeast corner beside the sidewalk and West Drive. Regina pointed out a tall plant she called 6. sweetspier or *Itea*. I made this sketch of leaves and flower buds, then searched for the plant in many reference books, without success. Regina was kind enough to send me a list of plantings and I learned the plant's full scientific name is *Itea virginiana*. According to her list, it was planted last November. Barbara Stonecipher, who answers many of my plant questions, says it is a southern plant, has been overlooked, displays long white flower spikes, can grow 9 feet tall and needs moisture. Near it is Carolina allspice *Calycanthus floridus*, which is also called hairy allspice because it has fuzzy twigs and under-leaves. Unlike the other flowering plants we saw, this one has red-brown blooms. You can get a closer look at it over in Strawberry Fields south of the hollies along the wood-chip path. Regina drew my attention to bottle-brush grass *Hystrix patula*, which has V-shaped flower clusters tipped with long stiff bristles and will grow more than 3 feet high. We passed New York fern *Thelypteris novaboracensis* and 3. boneset *Eupatorium perfoliatum*. Boneset will put out flat-topped clusters of white flowers from July to November, but even without flowers you will know it by its peculiar leaves. They not only grow tight to the stem, they surround it in a strangle hold. Leaf pairs are wide at the center, pointed at the



tips. Arranged at right angles to pairs above and below, they make a spiral of blades down the stem. A plant with joined leaves, said "herb doctors," should be good for broken bones, which is probably how this plant got its name.

Near the fence we passed woodland aster and a tall plant with leaves so thin I thought it was grass. It turned out to be blue-stemmed goldenrod. Both will flower later this summer.

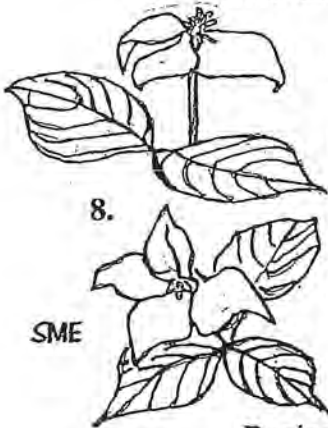
Walking north along the fence, we passed a cluster of trees: Osage-orange, a large, leaning red mulberry, a stand of sumac, mountain ash and hawthorn. Regina noticed white fuzzy circles on the hawthorn and collected specimens. They may be cocoons of insects that dine on this tree. We turned left and climbed the path leading west. Near the fence we saw a cork tree *Phellodendron amurense*, not nearly as old and large as the ones at Azalea Pond. We admired handsome stands of 7. Goatsbeard *Aruncus dioicus* with toothy, egg-shaped leaves and graceful spikes of frothy, white flowers. Near the top of the rise we saw what I thought were giant violets but are called 1. wild ginger *Asarum canadense*. The heart-shaped leaves have hairy undersides and stems. This plant bloomed in April-May but is still handsome ground cover. Mixed in with it is 2. May apple *Podophyllum peltatum*. In May the leaves cover the fruit like an umbrella. Now in June, the fruit has fallen and the leaves spread wide as cart wheels. We looked at more ground cover I thought was periwinkle *Vinka minor* but turned out to be *Euonymus fortunei*. Well away from the fence we saw 5. false Solomon's seal *Smilacena racemosa*, which is blooming now. All the flowers grow at the end of the stalk. I made this sketch of 4. (real) Solomon's seal *Polygonatum oderatum* in April with its flowers hanging like bells along the stem. Now these bells are turning into blue-black fruit.

We retraced our steps passing 8. Korean or Asian dogwood *Cornus kousa* on both sides of the path. This tree is blooming now a month after our native dogwoods. The greenish white flowers have pointed tips surrounded by deep green leaves. They gleam in bright sun.

All these plants were delightful to see but they were not the reason for our visit. I had come with Regina to inspect some precious new trees. They are 9. Korean evodia *Evodia danellii*! Five evodia trees have been planted around the back of Tanner Spring. We inspected three of them and one looked as if it had survived some sort of blight. But it is fighting back and putting out new leaves. The other two look dandy. They are 3 to 4 feet high.

Regina pointed to the tree's compound leaves. Pairs of leaflets grow opposite each other across a deep red stalk with one leaflet at the tip. The leaflets are smooth, somewhat glossy, light green with a pink-red midvein that extends half way to each leaflet tip. I counted leaves with 7 and 9 leaflets. "Know where the leaflet ends?" asked Regina. "Where you see the swelling or bulge." That's useful information. When you look at other compound leaves on locusts or horse chestnuts run your fingers down the stem until you feel the bump at the end.

I am VERY GRATEFUL to the Central Park Conservancy staff who purchased and planted these magical trees. In time, their abundant seeds will divert many birds and delight generations of bird watchers in fall migrations. I saved this best gift for last. But there are many more plants to see and enjoy in cool shade at Tanner Spring. Take binoculars and a plant book with you--your own or one from the library. Circle the fences looking at all the plants. See a mystery? Sketch it and you will notice more about it. Then look for it in your reference book.



Strange and Silent Spring

Usually, in June at the Model Boat Pond, crowds of people line up at telescopes to see flapping and leaping young red-tailed hawks. There are cries of delight as the young birds finally take to the air and land in trees or on buildings. But this year the crowds of hawk-watchers are gone. Anxious guardians no longer line the benches peering at the Fifth Ave. nest. The young hawks, which began so well and looked so robust in May, are dead. The first young red-tailed chick died May 11, the second one died May 21, says Ben Cacace, who put this message on e-birds NYC.

Ken Brown witnessed one of the deaths. He told me he saw swelling, up in the throat near the bill, not down at the crop. The young bird had its mouth open, trying to breathe. It tilted, staggered and eventually toppled over. One of these birds fell back into the nest and remained there, feet up. The second fell over the side to the pavement below. We do not know who picked it up or what they did with it. I have been told the female returned to the nest and was seen trying to pull up her young by its head feathers. She continued to return to the nest accompanied by Pale Male. He seemed to be trying to get her away. He has lost many mates but this is the first death of his progeny.

Ben says the young hawks died of Frounce's disease. It is caused by a paramecium (a kind of protozoa) named *Trichomonas*, says Peter Nilsson, who searched the Internet for it. Birds who get Frounce may develop white spots on the throat, flick their heads and regurgitate. In the last stages they pant and topple. Frounce is highly contagious between birds, and the young hawks may have gotten it by eating diseased pigeons. Hawks that survive Frounce's disease have lifetime immunity thereafter. This explains why the disease was fatal to the young but not to their parents.

Red-tailed hawks are federally protected, and I think their nest is, too. It will require some sort of federal approval to remove the dead hawk in the hawk nest. Will the remains of the diseased carcass put next year's hawk chicks at risk? I have no idea. What measures will be taken to clean the nest? Will it be removed? Time will tell.

Our pair of mute swans have not been successful this year, either. For weeks, she sat on her nest in the phragmites west of Bow Bridge. He guarded the nest territory, but less diligently as time passed. We never saw little gray cygnets on the Lake with their parents. Richard Kerzansky, Central Park's soil and water man, visited the nest on June 19. He said the nest is there but he saw no eggs, egg shells or dead cygnets. The surrounding vegetation is freshly chewed and Richard said it looks like they have been sitting on the site. I asked if the nest looked soggy. No, it did not. We both remember a heavy spring rainstorm which raised the water level of the Lake. Rising water could have drowned the eggs. Perhaps all the nibbled vegetation is to add bulk and raise the level of the nest. Richard says it is definitely being used, though not for young. He has seen the adults out and about on the Lake.

Correction

Several of you have told me of a mistake on my Birders Map of the Ramble. Number 24 appears twice on your map. The one above is right. Change the one below to 25. Also, I left out Warbler Walk, the sidewalk between Bow Bridge and the Gorge at the edge of the Lake. Add 45. to the map as shown. At the end of the long list on the right side put in 45. Warbler Walk. If you write small and neat, or you cut this print out and paste it at the bottom of the list, you will not spill over to the title panel of the pamphlet.

A birder asked if he could just photocopy my map and give it to a friend. No. That's what copyright is all about. The friend, who is very careful about rights to her photos, says I should tell people sure, you don't have to take the newsletter. You can just buy the map--- for \$20.



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45. Warbler Wa

THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol.8 No. 4

July--August 2002

Weather and Wildlife

It's been a hot and hellish summer, good for Con Edison but bad for human comfort. Day after day the promised showers never arrived. But on Friday evening, August 2, Mother Nature gave us a bonanza. Flash! and Boom! filled the sky--- the flashes high and bright, the crack and rattle of an aerial attack. Looking south, I saw long strands of lightning etch the sky and snake from river to river. Torrents of rain filled the streets. In parts of NY, CT and NJ there was hail the size of mothballs, said the NY Times. The tumult subsided but the torrential rain continued. And then, the thunder and lightning returned! This was the biggest storm I've ever seen. I heard on the radio there were over 400 lightning strikes, but don't know how the number could be tabulated. Still, you don't need the numbers to know it was a mighty big storm.

Saturday morning was bright and sunny, hot and humid. I went to the Conservatory Garden to meet a hearty group of nature lovers from New York City Audubon. I arrived early and found a handsome cicada, newly dead, which I showed to the group as they arrived. It was bright green with a coat of arms of black circles across the shoulders. Cicadas, like dragonflies, lose color after death and this one lost definition before I could sketch it.

We entered the South Garden and stepped around the circumference to see butterflies while a wedding party assembled around the drained lily pool. We saw carpenter, bumble and honey bees. There were cabbage white, tiger swallow tail, silver-spotted skipper and summer azure. Wonderful Lenore Swenson identified 3 more skippers: crossline, sachem and fiery. Some of the group saw 2 raccoons in the South Garden.

In the North Garden we saw a mystery wasp. It was amber from the waist forward. The abdomen at the back was glossy black with lines of white dots and dashes across the widest part. The front body and wings were amber enough to be a great golden digger wasp but the back end looked like a jumbo version of a bald-faced wasp. These wasps were very large. Flying with them was a jumbo-sized queen, the biggest wasp I have ever seen. My guides don't show what we saw.

Along the shore of the Meer we discovered blue dasher, amberwing, black saddlebags and green darner dragonflies. Searching through the purple flower spikes and elongated, heart leaves of pickerelweed, we found four damselflies: orange bluet, civil or friendly bluet, violet bluet and several fork-tail (green at the front, turquoise-blue at the back.)

We stopped to examine turkey oak, black walnut, black willow in the loch and red oak above it. Some of the group listed birds. We saw cormorant and Canada goose in the Meer, red-winged blackbird and Eastern kingbird beside it, chimney swifts above. Fishing in the Loch was a great egret. Along our walk we saw buddleia (butterfly bush), oakleaf hydrangea, bayberry. Joyce Hyon pointed out white snake root, cup plant, poke weed, bittersweet and burdock, with pink purple flowers. The 100 St. Pool, which is being restored, was full of water, but surrounded by fence. As I pointed out a white oak, Ann Lazarus spotted a mystery dragonfly over the water and sketched a 12 spot. Lenore saw it too. I said good-bye to the group, and walked the park looking for trees hit by the storm. I saw none. A week later I found a tree west of the East Drive at 84 St. The canopy was removed and large branches covered the ground. Lightning had slashed and gouged a swirling path down the full length of the trunk. Others, I learned, were hit in the northwest part of the park.



SHE

Tabulating Turtles



Over in Turtle Pond the waters live up to the name. Unfortunately, a sign saying Dragonfly Preserve does not. Once this area was the best for dragonflies in the park. Now we see damselflies in the weeds but few dragonflies out over the water. Some nature enthusiasts think it's because too many turtles eat dragonfly nymphs under water. The young are snapped up long before they can crawl out to become airborne adults.

This summer a team of high school students have been working with turtles. With encouragement from Christina Kruger of Parks Conservation Corps, and team leaders Elizabeth Williams and Stephen Modica, the students stood on Turtle Pond wharf and tossed dried cat food into the water. Instantly turtles swam to the wharf to snap up the bait in the water. Using a net, students would scoop out a turtle and examine it. On data sheets they recorded the kind of turtle, its weight, length, height, sex and health. I interviewed about half of the team, including Andrea Gutierrez, Denise Cortolano, Kevin Hollis, Claire Bendersky, and Mark Santiago. On the last day I learned lots about turtles from Matthew Sturken and admired population charts made by Laura Muscich. Elizabeth Williams loaned me snapshots of turtles and made 6 digital photos (see above and p.4), which I took away on a disk.



This summer the students caught and measured 111 red-eared sliders, named for red stripes behind their eyes. More than half of them (70) are large heavy females, the largest 226 millimeters or almost 9 inches. The 40 males are smaller and lighter. Students listed 1 Florida cooter and 1 snapping turtle, both females. Two other snappers – 1 adult and 1 immature – were seen but not caught. Six Eastern painted turtles – 1 m, 5 f – and 4 Western painted turtles – 3 m and 1 f – were documented. These results are quite different from the turtle census completed in 1996, when Turtle Pond was drained and enlarged. In '96, Turtle Pond had 18 red-eared sliders, 3 musk turtles, 2 painted turtles and 2 cooters, which were moved to the Upper Lobe. Clearly the current population contains a HUGE population of red-eared sliders. And that's only the adults near the surface. Young sliders are too small and timid to compete. They stay below and eat meat such as dragonfly nymphs, but with age, they change their diet to plants. Also down at the bottom are snapping turtles. They lie with gaping mouths, said Elizabeth Williams, and snap when food comes by – hence the name.

Matthew Sturken told me that red-eared sliders are one of the most invasive species in the world. In Japan and Southern Europe, they are driving out local species of turtles and could be here, too. In June, each female can lay 1 to 2 dozen eggs. All turtles lay eggs on dry land because their eggs aren't waterproof. If all 70 slider females lay their eggs around Turtle Pond next spring, we will have 840 to 1,680, plus the eggs of unlisted females. You can sex males sliders in the water by the long claws on their front legs. They use their nails to tickle the head and neck of females. When mating is over, courtship continues. Mark saw eager males sidle up to a female to scratch and tickle her as she ate the cat food. Females are really irritated by male attention out of season, he said.

When the team put in a net and pulled up a turtle, they looked for irregularities in the shell structure. Turtle shells are divided into separate areas, each one called a scute. On the underside, you see a circle of scutes around the body. Usually, the sliders have 12 scutes per side, each containing a black mark. Using a file, team members notched a scute on each side of the body. Scute # 1 was close to the head, scute # 6, between the legs, and the identifying number was "L-1 R-6." Three-digit numbers were notched once on the left side, once on the right and once again on the left. Some turtles had 13 scutes or were missing several scutes on the side. Shell irregularities were marked on the data sheets. Some turtles kept returning for the cat food. If they had notches, they went right back in the pond. Working with turtles, said the students, was "totally different."

Centipede Celebrity

In Sept. '97 a small group people from the American Museum of Natural History crossed the street and joined woodlands people from Central Park. This biodiversity team joined forces again in spring, summer and fall of '98. They went to the North Woods, Ramble and Hallett Sanctuary to collect buckets full of leaf litter- rotting leaves, fungi, small twigs, seeds and soil on the forest floor. They collected leaf litter – because it contains hundreds of invertebrates – tiny creatures with no backbones. The team put leaf litter through a cloth sieve to separate and remove large pieces of vegetation. Back at the museum the mix was put through a Bursese funnel. As damp soil dried, the invertebrates fell to the bottom, through the wire, and were “pickled.” Identification was a 2-step process. The invertebrates were divided into groups such as slugs, snails, earthworms, springtails, sowbugs, click beetles, dung beetles, bees, ants, spiders, millipedes and centipedes, to name a few. (Millipedes and centipedes look similar but millipedes have 2 pairs of legs per body segment and they are vegetarians.) Next each group of invertebrates were teased apart to identify separate species. Some of the groups could be studied and identified by people at the museum. Others were sent to experts around the country. All the centipedes and millipedes went to Richard L. Hoffman at the Virginia Museum of Natural History. He studied them, identified North American species and sent several he could not identify to experts in Italy.

In the Italian collection was a tiny centipede. It was pale yellow, and like other centipedes, flat, long, narrow and divided into segments with a pair of legs for each segment. Many of our centipedes are about an inch long, or longer. This centipede measured about 1 centimeter, less than ½ inch. The Italians used a mega-microscope, to learn this tiny centipede (true size above plus big enough to see) has 82 legs – 41 a side. Luckily, there were 10 specimens to study – 8 juveniles, a female containing sperm and one with a head and scattered body pieces. This centipede looked similar to ones from Asia, but did not look like any known specimen and had never been seen before. The species and the genus were brand new. They named it *Nannarrup hoffmani* Hoffman's dwarf centipede. He's delighted to have been honored with the name and world fame. The biodiversity team are proud to be the ones who collected the centipede right here in Central Park.

I went to the library to learn more about centipedes. On their heads they have short antennae and eyes but poor vision. The first jointed pair of legs behind the head are short with sharp, pointed claws which they use like fangs to grab and tear their food. In a fight, a gland in the head fills the fangs with poison to paralyze the mollusks, worms, insects and nematodes they eat. Paralyzed meat makes for easier eating. Centipedes hunt at night. They can run without tripping over their legs because they undulate in rhythm. As they travel, the legs on one side are clustered along the body, to grip their path. The ones on the other side are spread out to move forward. They alternate sides for cluster and spread as they move in a centipede quick step.

Centipede courtship takes place in spring and summer, after which they mate – outside the body. The male builds a shallow web of silk-like threads. He deposits a single package which contains his sperm cells. The female moves over the web and collects the package or spermatophore. She transfers it to her ovary, where fertilization takes place. She carries the eggs around for some time and deposits them one by one in protected places such as in a rotten log or under a stone. The eggs are covered with a coating which makes them stick to soil particles. Not all centipedes scatter the eggs. Some females make a nest in an enlarged cavity or fallen log. They remain on guard by this chamber as the eggs hatch and the larvae appear. The young disperse, grow larger through a series of molts until they are mature and ready to mate. So far, we don't know if Hoffman's dwarf centipede scatters her eggs or guards them as a group. But the experts in Italy have decided to reclassify Asian centipedes because of our park find.



Dr. Hoffman was quoted in The New York Times as lamenting that the next generation of humans will not go out to study animals and classify them. That gloomy prediction may be true, but it certainly doesn't seem to be the case in Central Park. Thanks to Robin Lloyd for sending me many sizes of this drawing of the centipede by Donatella Foddai and a booklet, "Life in the Leaf Litter," by Elizabeth Johnson and Kefyn Catley with drawings by Patricia Wynne. Liz Johnson cheerfully answered many of my questions about the biodiversity team and how the specimens were processed. The booklet is free to the public, through the Central Park Conservancy.

Nest News

On the walk between The King of Poland Statue and Shakespeare Theater is a lamppost with a bright yellow emergency call box. Art LeMoine directed me to a large elm, near the call box, behind the fence and in view of Turtle Pond. A high arching branch of this elm bends toward a young, small-leaved maple. Deep in elm leaves is a hanging nest of light straw, slightly larger than a softball. It is round with thin walls, cinched at the top, and the sides are pierced by many small branches to hold it in place. This marvel of weaving is the work of a female orchard oriole.



The male, decked out in black and chestnut finery, could be last year's immature bird who proved he was old enough for fatherhood. Birds, like humans, are creatures of habit and this habitat seemed familiar. Last year their nest was beside the wharf and backed up to Shakespeare Theater. A young bird fell out of that nest and into the water. A birder rescued the chick and placed in on a fence. A grackle came down and ate it. But if one or both parents returned they must have had some nesting success. This year they nested farther from the pond, bright lights and booming bard. Art LeMoine said he saw the male gather insects from the grassy edge of a baseball diamond on the Great Lawn. The female flew to the rocks below the Castle to glean bugs. Soon the young were strong enough to pop out of the nest to a branch and receive food from a parent, then pop back into the nest. Others saw 3 birds fledge. Two flew to perches but one, less fortunate, landed deep in the grass on the Great Lawn. Some birders doubt that it survived. This is the second orchard oriole nest in Central Park this century. These lovely birds have not nested here since the late 1800's.



SME

Last year's young green herons must have imprinted on our park because this year they returned to nest. There was one nest at Turtle Pond. At the west shore of the Upper Lobe a pair of green herons made a spring nest and later used the same nest for their summer family. Another nest was built beside them in an adjacent oak. The four families produced a total of 11 young, says Lloyd Spitalnik. That must be a park record. Most years we don't see green heron nests.

The red-headed woodpecker with the broken wing stayed here this summer, a park first for the season, perhaps. It hangs out at the Locust Grove and Tanner Spring. Wouldn't it be grand if it mated and we had a nest next summer.

Fall Classes

Though the weather is broiling it's almost time for fall bird classes, with looks at some trees, flowers and insects. Here's the schedule: **5 Sundays at 9 AM beginning Sept. 15 at Loeb Boathouse. 5 Wednesdays at 9 AM beginning Sept. 18.** Enter park at **76 St. and Fifth Ave.** and join group at **inside benches.** For classes send **\$35 check to address below. Drop-ins pay \$10.**

I will do **3 noontime walks, Sept. 26, Oct. 10 and Oct. 24 at Battery Park City.** We meet at **Wagner Park.** These walks are free but **call 212-267-9700 for travel instructions.**

THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol. 8 No. 5

September~October

Great Sight at the Reservoir

Starr Saphir called me Saturday evening, Oct. 26, and told me there was a Great Cormorant in the park on the east side of the Reservoir. Wonderful news! It's the first Central Park record for this bird. I looked through bird guides to Iceland, Britain, Europe & North Africa, China, India and Australia. The great cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* is seen in all of them! The North American range map in Sibley shows that the bird winters along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to Florida, fishing in waters warmed by the Gulf Stream. Since Central Park is just wing flaps from the Atlantic, it's surprising this cormorant hasn't been listed here before.

On Sunday, I went to the Reservoir, and starting at the Southeast corner walked north, peering at the dyke. Beyond a cluster of gulls I saw a majestic cormorant standing upright on the dyke. The double-crested cormorants looked scruffy and hump-backed by comparison. I looked away, distracted by a fast runner, and when I looked back, the bird was gone. Then I found it again, deep in water with only the head and neck visible. It jumped up, cleared the surface, made a curving dive and disappeared through a small circle of water. When it reappeared, the head and neck were 8 or 10 feet closer. The bird dove and dove again, in unpredictable directions. Then it emerged with head tilted back, a large bulge vibrating in the throat. Beyond its parted bill something small was flicking like the tongue of a snake. Soon the bouncing throat was smooth, the bulge gone, the bill closed. The bird flew to the dyke and, like an ancient priest, raised enormous kimono-like wings to the sun.

I moved north to the Conservatory Garden to admire the chrysanthemums, now in glorious bloom. The flowers were covered with many kinds of bees, including honey bees. It's reassuring to see them in larger numbers this year. If you go now, you can see this large circle of mums in many colors. They are in the **North Garden at 106 St. and Fifth Ave.** If you show up with plastic tote bags at **9 AM, November 12**, you can dig out and take home a mum of your choice. Thank you, Central Park Conservancy, for the gift that keeps giving pleasure.

I bumped into David Chadwick on the sloping meadow and we were deep in conversation about wild grasses and park trees, when a tall man with large telescope came along. Was he a bird watcher? Yes. Did he know about the Great Cormorant? No. Would he like to see it? Sure. As we hiked to the Reservoir I learned his name is Neil O'Hara from southern England who began watching birds in New York. We spotted the cormorant on the dyke but the visibility was terrible. We were looking into the sun. We hiked south along the fence and at Neil's firm suggestion rounded the corner, and passed the **South Pumping Station. This is where we meet for the Annual Christmas Bird Count, 8 AM, December 15, 2002-- Bring binoculars, a pen and \$5 exact.**



Neil set up his scope west of the Pumping Station and found the bird along the dyke. We both used his swivel eyepiece, set at 12 o'clock for him, and lower at 8 or 7 for me. We could see the cormorant facing into the sun. As Neil described what he saw, I took notes. The dark head was lighter around the ear. The eye, dark blue with a hint of green. (Sibley shows emerald eyes.) The bill was gray and tipped with a downward hook. Under each eye and behind the bill were yellow cheek patches. Later, when the bird was preening, Neil saw its yellow chin band under the bill. The cormorant had a white throat and a light brown breast speckled with darker brown. This faded to a dirty white belly, also with brown flecks. First year or juvenile birds

have white bellies, adult birds have black ones. On the flanks, under the wings, we saw dull, deep-gray bands of feathers with no gloss. By contrast, all the feathers on the head, back, wings and tail were black with a sheen. The legs were gray; the webbed feet were black. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this bird stayed around for the Christmas Count and reappeared next year as an adult.

Beautiful Bat

As Neil and I were looking at the great cormorant, a voice behind me said, "Are you Sarah Elliott?" I admitted it. She said her name is Eve Levine and she had seen my message in the Bird Book at the Boat House, asking to hear from anyone who had seen a red bat in the park this fall. Eve went home to consult her notes and called me with her good news. She saw the bat August 8, flying over the northern tip of Strawberry Fields. She watched it forage near the ground for 10 or 15 minutes, just before sunset (8:07 PM). She said it looked very orange.

The reason I wanted a sighting from Central Park this fall was that I saw a red bat, too. Only it wasn't in Central Park. When I was leading a bird walk at Battery Park City, staff members began telling me there was a bat in the garage at headquarters. I climbed into one of their electric trucks and we glided to the building. As we rolled down the ramp, we saw a small lump attached to the plastic grid over a light fixture in the ceiling. Sure enough it was a bat hanging upside down by its toes. The body was about 3 inches long from head to back end. The hair was soft red-brown, frosted with pinkish white on the back and rump. We were looking at the colors of a female. The hair on her chest and shoulders was thick and white. Her wings were folded. Her forearms were hairless, the skin a shiny rust-brown. They were folded across her chest, partially covering a large dark eye. I think her tail was wrapped around her body but the light was too dim to tell.

Male red bats have a brighter rust coat, but the hair is not as orange as the picture on our new 37 cent stamp. Their ears are short, round and partly furry. Bats are the only mammals that can fly, and this bat flies on narrow wings about a foot long from one tip to the other. They are the only medium-sized red bat we can see here. I have come across a number of red bats in Central Park—all of them males. This was the first female I have ever seen.

The scientific name for the red bat is *Lasiurus borealis* (La-see-ur-us bor-ee-al-us). Say it over 4 times and you can impress your friends. They live alone or as a family cluster in forests. They are found in North, Central and maybe even South America. Unlike many other bats, they migrate, going north in April and May and south in September to late November. In August and September they become acrobats and breed on the wing. It takes the beat of all 4 wings for a moment's delight. Why would the female become pregnant just after raising her young and in time for winter and a reduced food supply? She doesn't. Instead, she stores the male's sperm in her uterus for the winter. In spring, eggs and sperm unite, and 1 to 4 (usually 3) young are born in late May to mid-June. At first, the young are blind and hairless. They cling to their mother and drink her milk. At 4 weeks they are half mom's weight and ready to be weaned. In 3-6 weeks they can fly and learn to feed themselves crickets, beetles, moths and flies.

Bats hunt at dusk. They have eyes to see but locate their position by the sounds they emit and catch insects by the sounds they make in flight. Red bats feed close to the ground or as high as tree tops. In cities they hunt under street lights, which attract insects. They catch food in the basket of skin around their tails, or scoop it into the web of their wing. They crunch dinner with sharp teeth and digest it rapidly.

Why was this little bat in the garage and not on a tree? The night before, October 16, we had a fierce storm with high winds. So she slipped inside the building to get out of the wet. Bats sleep days, and she was having a snooze before continuing south for the winter.



Mysterious Mushrooms

On September 18, the Wednesday Bird Group was nearing Azalea Pond when Jill Benzer looked down at the base of an old red oak and found lots of mushrooms clustered between the roots. I said, "Hen something" and went home to look them up. They are hen-of-the-woods *Grifola frondosa*. When I returned, most of the hens had been ripped from the wood. Only smashed shreds remained. I found 2 small clusters still in place and sketched them.

I found the woodpecker tree above the Gill and across the walk from Muggers Woods. Beautiful clusters of mushrooms were strung along the trunk I was told these were oyster mushrooms *Pleurotus ostreatus*. They looked very white, fleshy and fresh and I stood a long time to sketch them. Then I flopped down on a bench at the Azalea Pond and fell into conversation with a man named Byron. He wanted to see my find so we trudged to the tree. Yes, he said, oysters.

Turning around, he plucked a small mushroom he said was *Russula emitica* from the Greek, causing to vomit. Not one to try with dinner. When fresh it has a round, slimy, bright red cap. This one was dry, not slimy. It was still bright red but the round cap had taken a dip in the middle, and the ridges around the edge turned up. New white gills and stem had turned to ivory with age. I brought it home and sketched it from 3 angles.

One of my guides is "National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms" by Garry Lincoff. He is a well-known mycologist at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, who has been teaching there since the 1970's. On October 8, we had the pleasure of hearing him speak to the Linnaean Society at the American Museum of Natural History. He told us there are only 12 or 15 groups of mushrooms. If you see them here, you can see them in many other parts of the world. He showed us slides of marvelous mushrooms from each group.

On October 20, an enthusiastic group joined Gary Lincoff at 100 St. and Central Park West at 4 PM for a mushroom walk. Early arrivals got to see mushrooms he had collected that day. As I arrived he was showing a stinkhorn. When I examined it, I saw the top was brown, pitted and slimy. The stalk was pure white and there was a bulge at the base.

We circled the fence at 100 St. Pool and walked into the woods. Gary said you can enjoy mushrooms in the spring, but there's more diversity in fall. From Labor Day to the end of October is the best time to find mushrooms. There are ground mushrooms to see in August and September, and mushrooms on wood, October and November. You can see 100+ mushrooms in Central Park.

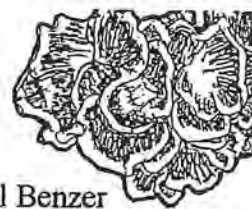
Gary showed us violet-toothed polypore *Trichaptum biformis*, and turkey tail *Trametes versicolor*, which I brought home to sketch. We looked at the brackets on black locust trees. Both the tree *Robinia pseudoacacia* and the bracket *Phellinus robinia* are named for Jean and Vespasien Robin, who as herbalists to the King of France introduced the black locust tree to Europe.

Someone plucked a small mushroom from grass and Gary told us it was a lilac fiber head *Inocybe lilacina*, a pretty but poisonous mushroom. We also looked at a parasol mushroom *Lepiota christata* of about the same size. Someone rushed up the west bank of the Loch and found a puffball *Lycoperdon pyriforme*. Eager puffball eaters climbed the slope, but this puffball was past its prime. We looked at mustard-yellow polypore *Phellinus gilvus*, the same genus as the black-locust bracket. It is tough, hairy, stemless and on trees. Cut it open and you see the mustard-yellow color.

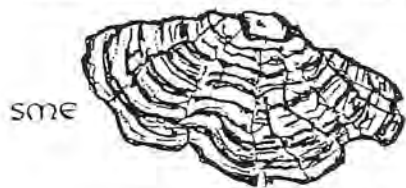
Gary ended this awesome walk by urging us to make spore prints of what we collect. Cut off the stem, places the mushroom underside down on a 3X5 card and leave it a few hours or overnight. Spores (mushroom seeds) drop to the paper and make a color pattern on the card. The spores can be pink, white, brown or black, and they help you identify your mushroom. He sprays his with fixative. He corrected my copy and kindly signed my guide, which was much used for this account.



SME



SME

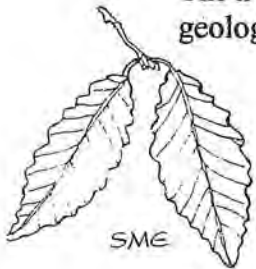


SME

Tree Walk

On Oct. 19, I led a tree walk for N. Y. Audubon Society and 2 dozen people in Central Park. We expected to see fall color but most of the trees were green. In fact, this has been the latest fall I remember. We began at 72 St. near Fifth Ave. On the south side, behind the benches, we admired a yellow buckeye *Aesculus octandra*. James McCollough, now 6, scrambled over the bench and brought back a piece of the smooth, dull-yellow shell and fruit. The fruit is a large, shiny-brown nut that looks like the nuts of its cousin, the horsechestnut tree. We passed these treasures around, then crossed the street to the curved marble bench on the north side. Behind and left of the bench was a pin oak *Quercus palustris*. Circling the bench we walked right, to the handsome English oak *Q. robur* at the park wall and 5th Ave. We searched under its lofty branches for leaves and acorns to take with us. Then we crossed the sidewalk, got around the railing, and nodded to a scarlet oak *Q. coccinea*, which was still quite green. Walking west on Pilgrim Hill, we passed a white ash *Fraxinus americana* and watched kinglets and yellow-rumps chasing insects through the leaves.

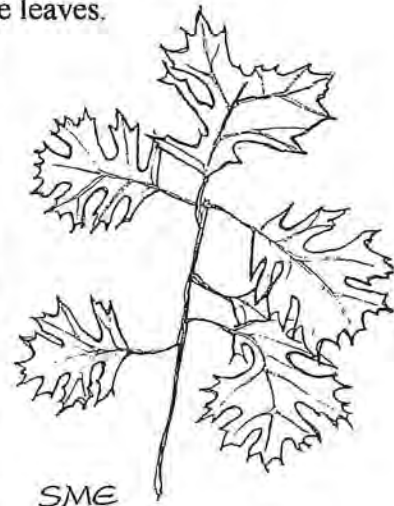
Behind Pilgrim Statue a winter fence bisects the hill. Just west of the fence are 2 oak trees I never knew were in the park until this fall. Nearest the statue is a Schward oak *Quercus schumardii*, as a handy tree plaque tells you. The tree was named to honor Benjamin Franklin Schumard (1820-69), the state geologist of Texas. These oaks have a straight, slender trunk and broad crown.



North and down hill from this oak is a chestnut oak *Q. prinus*.

I confessed to the group that Howard Stillman was the person who told me about this oak. He smiled and modestly accepted my thanks. The leaves are long and narrow (like an American chestnut) with wavy edges. Several people took samples for later.

We walked west to visit a shingle oak *Q. imbricaria* which wears a tree plaque and leans to the east. The leaves are deep green, long, slender and round or slightly pointed at the ends. When cut, the wood splits easily and was used for shingles---overlapping cover on early American homes.



Near the shingle oak is another English oak. This one, beside the low iron fence at the East Drive, is not as large or healthy as the one by Fifth Ave. But many bird watchers visit it in summer. It oozes sap, and that attracts butterflies and handsome bald-faced wasps.

We walked downhill to Trefoil Arch, the viaduct under the East Drive at 74th St. We found a group of birders and we all looked up at an old tree and nest where 2 red-phase screech owls spend their days. The owl tree was a linden, and Howard found us the fruit: a seed-and-leaf combination that reminds me of a New Year's noisemaker. We walked through the viaduct and along the Boathouse, looking at willow oaks *Q. phellos*. The trees are tall and strong like an oak with long, narrow leaves like a willow. They fill the Boathouse parking lot.



In the Ramble we visited the Evodia Field and the tree for which it is named, then on to the flat meadow below the Castle. There we paid our respects to the famous sour gum or black tupelo *Nyssa sylvatica*. In the fall, when this tree turns scarlet, it is the most photographed tree in the park. This year the conflagration will take place in November. We walked through Muggers Woods, crossed the Rustic Bridge and turned south to the American chestnut *Castanea dentata*. These once abundant trees were wiped out by chestnut blight. This one was perhaps 10 when it was planted in 1985. So far, so good. People with chestnut oak leaves held them up and we compared them to the American chestnut. They were the same general shape, but the edges of the oak leaves made rounded waves while the edges of the American chestnut leaves were definitely toothy.

THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

Nature Notes from Central Park

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Zenith Count

What a Christmas Count! Never in its 103 years was there a count like this one. On Sunday, December 15, at 8 AM, a few birders had assembled beside the Pumping Station at the southeast corner of the Reservoir. By 8:10 lots more had arrived and I told them to fill out the address cards and hand them back with their money. Anne Lazarus and Gaye Fugate were kind enough to hand out the cards and take them back along with the cash. Gaye kept all the money and cards, and took in more at the Arsenal from people who came late. She counted the total and typed a list of 64 people whose hard- to- read names will appear in print.

Laura Martuscelli, who handles special events for the Rangers, brought a loud-speaker. She announced that a bus, supplied by the Central Park Conservancy, would be waiting at 110 St. at noon to take tired birders to the Arsenal. A murmur of appreciation was heard.

I greeted the crowd and explained the blue "Dos, Don'ts and Tips" sheet which was passed out. I held up the yellow "Section Tally" sheets and urged people to use and share them as they jotted down bird numbers. They were passed out. I held up pale green section maps and asked for leaders starting with the Southwest. Oaks and Louise Ames said they would take it and got their maps with my thanks. Wendy Paulson took the Southeast and I went with them because I had the key to Hallett Sanctuary, and permission to enter the Zoo. A large crowd went with Irene Warshauer to the Ramble. Signe Hammer reported on the Great Lawn, with such good sections as Shakespeare Garden, Locust Grove and Tanner Spring. David Kraus arrived at the Reservoir early to count the gulls before they left for the day. Neil O'Hara and E.J. McAdams joined him to count the remaining water and land birds. A large contingent of gung-ho birders held out for the Northeast and Northwest sections, determined to capture the prize sightings of the day. All the groups dispersed with Ranger escorts.

When our group reached 72 St. we split up and moved south. Those of us near the wall at Fifth Ave saw no birds for blocks. But when we reached the playground near 67 St., our luck changed with white-throated sparrows. Anne Lazarus counted them carefully as they frolicked in surrounding bushes. Just north of the transverse we saw woodpeckers and jays. We walked along the East Drive and peered through the fence and counted birds on and under the feeders behind the Zoo. We passed the Dairy and met Wendy Paulson with the other half of our group at Hallett Sanctuary. Mike Mui, our Ranger escort, figured out how to open the wire fencing and I unlocked the gate. The footing in Hallett is tricky so I urged people to walk carefully and stay together. Two people saw a brown creeper, more saw a towhee and we were all thrilled to see 3 peregrine falcons. One of the peregrines flew north along Fifth Ave. The other 2, who seemed to be of different sizes, stayed in the south, circling each other. Perhaps they are a pair getting ready for courtship.

We left the Sanctuary, circled the 59th St. Pool, not counting the ducks, which had been done before, and went to the Zoo. When I said we were expected, a girl at the gate called the Security Guard and we were allowed in. We looked at the feeders from the inside of the Zoo for a slightly different collection of birds, and at large evergreens, hoping in vain for an owl. Our count complete,



we watched the sealions cavorting around their pool, on our way to the Arsenal. On the third floor, the room was filling with birders. We lined up for Soup in a Sandwich and beverages. I sat down, ate and rummaged through my backpack for the speech I was going to make.

When the room was full and everyone was eating, the ceremonies began. We received a cheery welcome from Alex Brash, Chief of Urban Park Service. He introduced Regina Paruggi, President of the Central Park Conservancy. She said a few charming and amusing words and then introduced Dick Gershon, Vice-President of New York City Audubon Society, who told about his organization, some of the good things they do, and how to join.

Then I was introduced and gave a little history on the Christmas Count. It began in Central Park and Princeton in 1899 and proved a popular alternative to hunting. Nature lovers told friends and the count expanded to 25 locations in 1900. Charles Rogers, age 12, went to the Ramble on Christmas day and reported 6 species: 12 herring gulls, 1 downy woodpecker, 4 starlings, "abundant" white-throated sparrows, 2 song sparrows and 1 robin. The following year Charles and 2 other boys went to Central Park but not together. Each did an individual count in deteriorating weather. And each sent in his report. At that time there was a fad, (promoted by Eugene Schiefflin) of importing all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare. That is why we have had European Goldfinch and chaffinch on our early counts and what in time became a glut of starlings. Over the years, individuals and small parties of birders changed to teams working as groups. With many eyes working, few birds escape our notice and count. I put in a plug for this newsletter, telling people they could see me after the count and pay cash or write a check to subscribe.

Then we began the tally. We worked our way through the first section, a list of **probable** birds—the ones we usually count each year. I announced a bird and each section leader in turn shouted out their number for that bird. When all 7 sections had reported, we learned the total number of individuals for that species. Laura Martuscelli had loaded the all-park list into her computer and tapped in the numbers lickety-split. When the numbers were large, I asked her for totals. She shouted out the numbers loud enough so that the whole room could hear her. Regina Paruggi gave totals for some birds with smaller populations and impressed me with her math skills.

Next we worked our way through **possible** birds--birds which sometimes show up and sometimes don't. Only 2 species on that list were reported this year. Last of all came the section marked **other**. This section is left blank for the day's unexpected or rare birds. I started the reports in the Northeast and worked down to the Southwest. As we were tabulating, Bob DeCandido arrived with his bird group. When we were finished, he reported they had seen 4 long-eared owls in the clump of pines at the base of Cedar Hill. That rounded our species count to 60 for the morning. A very respectable number. I thanked some of the people who had worked so hard to make this count a success. As the room cleared, a dozen people came over to order my newsletter. Many of the counters went off to the pines on Cedar Hill to see the 4 owls for themselves.

Joan Weiss kindly gave me a ride home and I crashed on my bed, having been awake since 4 AM. That evening Tom Fiore called. He went to the Inwood Hill Park Count early in the day. In the afternoon he came to Central Park and found lots of species not seen in the morning. As the week progressed I got reports from birders who had seen some of Tom's birds and other birds. A few were seen on the afternoon of the count day. The rest were seen in the count period. It was fascinating to see how the birds moved about or changed their numbers slightly. When it was all over we listed 69 birds for the day and 10 more for the count period. This is by far the largest number of birds ever counted in Central Park for Christmas. Most of these birds have been seen here before. But never before have so many of them been seen here at the same time.

Central Park Christmas Bird Count December 15, 2002

Pied-billed Grebe 1	Long-eared Owl 4	Fox Sparrow 6
Double-crested Cormorant 4	Red-headed Woodpecker 3	Song Sparrow 10
Great Blue Heron 3	Red-bellied Woodpecker 39	Swamp Sparrow 2
Mute Swan 2	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 20	White-throated Sparrow 1229
Canada Goose 568	Downy Woodpecker 44	Dark-eyed Junco 49
Wood Duck 5	Hairy Woodpecker 1	Red-winged Blackbird 6
Green-winged Teal 1	Northern Flicker 46	Rusty Blackbird 6
American Black Duck 51	Blue Jay 185	Common Grackle 42
Mallard 993	American Crow 9	House Finch 67
*hybridMallard 7 [not a species]	Black-capped Chickadee 4	American Goldfinch 10
Northern Shoveler 23	Tufted Titmouse 30	House Sparrow 799
Gadwall 2	White-breasted Nuthatch 35	69 species 6,671 individuals
American Widgeon 2	Brown Creeper 7	
Canvasback 1	Winter Wren 1	Birds Seen in Count Period
Bufflehead 14	Carolina Wren 6	Northern Waterthrush 1, 12/12.
Hooded Merganser 1	Golden-crowned Kinglet 1	Baltimore Oriole, im. 1, 12/12
Ruddy Duck 213	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 6	Pine Siskin 1, 12/12
Northern Harrier 1	Hermit Thrush 14	Great Cormorant 1, 12/12
Sharp-shinned Hawk 1	Wood Thrush 1	Belted Kingfisher 1, 12/13
Cooper's Hawk 1	American Robin 47	Red-breasted Nuthatch 1, 12/16
Red-tailed Hawk 12	Gray Catbird 2	Chipping Sparrow 1, 12/16
American Kestrel 1	Northern Mockingbird 6	Saw-whet Owl 1, 12/17
Peregrine Falcon 3	Brown Thrasher 1	Merlin 1, 12/18
American Coot 4	European Starling 214	White-crowned Sparrow 1, 12/18
Ring-billed Gull 274	Orange-crowned Warbler 1	10 species 10 individuals
Herring Gull 231	Nashville Warbler 1	
Great Black-backed Gull 55	Common Yellowthroat 1	TOTAL for COUNT and
Rock Dove 1172	Yellow-breasted Chat 1	COUNT PERIOD
Mourning Dove 13	Northern Cardinal 57	79 species 6,681 individuals
*Eastern Screech Owl	Eastern Towhee 6	
[2 "present", introduced]		

Starting at the beginning of this list, the Canada geese were a surprise. Skeins of them crossed our skies moving south. Of the 568, only a few were on the ground. The ducks were also a surprise. They are not uncommon, but to see so many species together, was. We tabulated the Great Cormorant for the count period. That's a park first, folks. We saw plenty of raptors—6 on the day and 1 more in the count period. Of these, the northern harrier and merlin were the most unusual. The red-tails are a headache. They move about and get counted more than once. We had 26 reported and I cut that to 12. Next year we may have a red-tail brigade to chase after them in a van, for a more accurate count. There were 3 species of owl, but the screech owls were introduced into the park and can't be counted yet. All 6 woodpeckers were out and about, including 3 red-headed. The one with a gimpy wing stayed all summer and now defends a roosting tree at Tanner Spring.

Chickadee numbers were small as they now live north of us. But there were good numbers of titmice and white-breasted nuthatches, with a red-breasted in the count period. We usually get 1 or 2 brown creepers and are the only location to do so in the Lower Hudson. This year there were 6 so I suspect their numbers have increased throughout the area. A golden-crowned kinglet and a

wood thrush were a happy surprise. And how nice we hosted all 3 mimic thrushes, though I suspect the catbird was counted twice as it hopped and flitted around the east and west shore of the Loch. There were 4 species of warbler on count day and one more in the count period. That number beats all records. The orange-crowned a first for this count, and chat have been around through the fall. I think common yellowthroat and Northern waterthrush have been here for other counts but perhaps not Nashville. We often see 1 towhee on our count but 6 is unheard of. An immature Baltimore oriole, pine siskin, and chipping sparrow brought sparkle to the winter bird feeders. A white-crowned sparrow appeared here in 1999 but it's good to see one again.

This year's list is large but most of the extra birds are in small numbers. Of the 69 species seen on the day, 30 of them, or 43%, were represented by no more than 5 individuals. Look through the list for species with only 1 or 2 birds. There are 21 of them, 30% of the total for the day. And all the birds in the Count period are represented by only 1 bird each. That's a large floating population and I'm glad they floated to us this year.

I looked over birds with big populations to see how steady their numbers have been in the past 4 counts. Pigeons range from 1050 to 1175. Mallards rose from last year's low of 414 to this year's high of 993. House sparrows numbered 1013 in '99, dipped and have come back to 993 this year. I added white-throated sparrows because of this year's number. They climbed steadily from 199 in '99 to 1229 this year. They even beat out the pigeons for the largest population in the park. European starlings zig-zag. In 2000 we counted 1035 of them. This year it was only 214. What caused the dip? West Nile virus? Chemical sprays? Indifferent bird counters? Perhaps many starlings decided to go elsewhere. We need to learn their numbers for the rest of the Lower Hudson.

I thank all the birds for coming and I thank lots and lots of people for their help. Laura Martuscelli who handles special events for the Urban Park Rangers printed all the forms and sheets for this count and sent out the invitations. She ordered the food, set up the tables, hung the big map and worked the computer. She organized the Rangers and gave out assignments. She took photographs of people and the grand cake made and decorated by a West-side high school.

I thank Regina Alvarez of Central Park Conservancy for writing invitations to staff members. She brought a 12-foot map to the Arsenal and we laid it out on the conference table. With the loan of cheery ink pens from nifty Norma Soto, we outlined the borders of the count sections. Then we applied section names and numbers with UHU glue. The brand name's a German word for eagle owl. I went to Regina's office with a scruffy bird list from a former count and Regina typed birds and pressed buttons to adjust 8 columns across the page. She typed the same list of birds in the same order with plenty of space beside each bird to scribble numbers while in the field. She did all this in an hour. The lists were e-mailed to Laura, who added the bird logo before printing them up.

My thanks to Jill Mainelli, who handles special events for Parks. She arranged that the Arsenal room was available for us, chaired our planning meeting, put a message on the RSVP phone, got permission to enter the Zoo and ordered the beverages.

My thanks to all the Rangers who helped us out: Sgts. Rich Simon, Gary Rozman and Patricia Auro, plus Ranger escorts for each section: Sgt. John McCoy, Rakeem Taylor, Bonnie McGuire, Susan Stanley, Deli DelPilar, Tony Fiore, Bill Schmidt, Scarlett Grauberg and Mike Mui. Deli DelPilar used to work in Central Park and it was great to see her again.

My thanks to Eric Adolfsen of the Parks Press Office for news stories that appeared in the NY Times, the Daily News, and on NBC News. Finally I thank the Rangers, Central Park Conservancy, The New York City Audubon Society and National Audubon Society for their donations to **fund the food**. Not enough birders called to RSVP. Next year we WILL DO BETTER!